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June 1841



THE
DREADFUL REQUISITION;
OR,
A TREATISE

ON THE
RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

IN PUNISHING THE NEGLECT OF SOULS.

BY THE
REV. CHARLES STOVEL.

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P R E F A C E.

THE following pages, contain the substance of five lectures, which were delivered at a series of revival meetings held on the 26th, 27th, 28th, 29th, and 30th days of December, 1836, in Shakspeare's Walk Meeting House, Shadwell, London. By the brethren who were then present their publication has been requested. After the mercy which was received, by all who attended on that occasion, it would be wrong if any possibility of hazard were suffered to prevent a compliance with their request ; and, if other motives were wanting, the respect due to those who took so large a share

in the undertaking would be sufficient to secure whatever they might wish, provided that the thing itself were practicable. The subject of the Lectures was selected as being likely to give an useful direction to the thoughts and feelings of brethren who were to engage in the other services ; and, as having a tendency to bring all hearts into a state of prayerful and penitential self-examination. In the effect which the awful subject has had upon his own mind, the author has been more than repaid for any expense of time or labour which may have been required in discharging his duty. Should the perusal of the tract produce a similar influence on his brethren, and lead them to more effective exertions in promoting a revival of pure and undefiled religion in our churches, and, in extending the reign of our blessed Lord, his cause for gratitude will be greatly increased. The first chapter is intended

to explain *the law by which God will correct his people for neglecting the souls of men.* The four following chapters are intended to exhibit *the righteousness of God in executing this law.* May the Spirit of all grace bless the whole and pardon the imperfection of his servant, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

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THE REQUISITION.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE LAW WHICH DEFINES JEHOVAH'S RE-
QUISITION OF THOSE WHO NEGLECT THE
SOULS OF MEN.

“His blood will I require at thine hand.”—EZEKIEL iii. 17.

As the whole argument of this work will be addressed to members and officers of the Christian Church, and relates to a subject of the greatest solemnity, it will be necessary for us to pay particular attention to the very letter of Divine law. The passage to which we must first appeal, therefore, is written in Ezekiel iii. 17, 18: “Son of man, I have made thee a watchman to the house of Israel :

therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die ; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life ; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity ; but his blood will I require at thine hand."

This is the law. Its primary application is, undoubtedly, to the prophet and the duties of his office ; but the whole tenour of Divine truth proves that it has also a solemn reference to every servant of the most high God. For each believing sinner is made a priest of God, to officiate in his Church as in a temple, interceding at his footstool for other sinners, and labouring in the world for their instruction. This kingdom of royal priests and teachers, therefore, are bound to consider the force of this Divine decree.

Our inquiry will be conducted with as much simplicity as we can possibly command. Observe, therefore,

1. *That the objects regarded in this law are the most deplorable sinners.*

Two classes are mentioned ; first, the wicked,

in whom no proof had been given of piety or repentance : secondly, the backslider, who was turning away from his righteousness. These may well represent the unconverted and the apostates of our own age.

The law, however, does not regard them merely as such, but as the objects of Divine denunciation. It was those of each class to whom the Lord had said, "Thou shalt surely die," for whose benefit this ordinance was given. Hence we find our Lord taking his place upon our earth in the midst of those very characters. A nation of apostates received his most gracious sympathies and devoted labours. He sent his servants to the most depraved and destitute of mankind, and gave to his whole kingdom an aggressive character, by which every individual member was employed in making compassionate inroads on the territories of darkness and of ruinous rebellion.

Hence it is obvious, that when warning precedes vengeance, it implies a purpose of mercy; that the space between a sinner's warning and his destruction is a space given for repentance; and, finally, that this space for repentance must

be occupied by his people in warning "the wicked from his wicked way to save his life."

2. *The offence, which this law supposes, is directed against this merciful design.*

But it does not imply a direct and positive hostility. The prophet might not have been the *tempter* of his countrymen; yet if he *neglected them*, God would require their blood at his hand.

Where this dreadful requisition will be eventually made must remain for God to declare; but we are bound to consider one or two cases, in which Christians are in danger of committing the offence.

I. *Christians are in danger of this sin when the words which denounce the wicked are concealed.*

This case is clearly defined in God's admonition to the prophet; "When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand."

Agreeably with this, the Church of the living God is said to be the pillar and ground of the

truth. Here, as in a sanctuary, it is preserved. From thence its solemn admonitions go forth to sinners, pointing out the way to life and death. All the saints are thus concerned in its proclamation. The whole world is their charge; and when the wrath which God has revealed against all ungodliness of men, and all who hold the truth in unrighteousness, is not declared, the Church has reason to be afraid.

II. *Christians are in danger of this sin whenever they compromise the claims of Divine truth.*

Faith cometh by hearing; but the truth is often heard and not believed. This is more fatal than complete ignorance; for then the word of life itself becomes a savour of death unto death. Zeal and fidelity will not always prevent this. "Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God giveth the increase." But many, for mean and worldly considerations, treat the act of faith with levity. Regeneration is represented as a superficial or even as a physical process. Repentance is softened down to the taste of men. Some deny the spiritual renovation of our hearts, as though both the Agent and the work were creatures of superstition and

fear. The word of God is thus made of none effect, and the warning of the wicked is full of perilous delusion. Little importance attaches to the method; souls are endangered by the sin. The perversion of a sacrament, the substitution of penance and human absolution, levity, or a false charity, may all mislead the unhappy victim. The practice may be gross, even to obscenity, or refined by the most exquisite taste; but, under every modification, that man has cause for dread who, in any way, becomes an agent in blunting the precept of his Lord, and in concealing the nature and necessity of true repentance.

III. *Christians are in danger of this sin when their compassionate exertions are defective.*

We must *speak* and *warn* the wicked to *save his life*. Our exertions here may be defective in two ways: first, the spirit of our exertions may be bad; secondly, they may not be so great as our opportunities and strength would allow. If, on the one hand, our words exhibit an ungenerous cruelty, opposed to the nature of Christian charity, the end is defeated by our own passions; if, on the other hand, neglect

of opportunities betray indifference, whatever we do must fail. By either of these sins Christians may facilitate the sinner's death. Hence, the dreadful fervour we find in the prophet's addresses; his mighty toil; his painful sufferings; his perfect self-consecration. But he was not singular: Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah seem oppressed with the burden of the Lord, and yet they pursue their sinful countrymen with a noble daring, hazarding their own lives for the rescue of the people. Paul wished himself accursed from Christ for his kindred, because his heart's desire was that they might be saved. In the labour of our Lord all kinds of perfection combined. His fidelity provoked the wicked even to rage; yet his love was so obvious that the vilest was unable to substantiate a charge of undue severity. He would not let them rest: they were ignorant, and he taught them: they were froward, and he warned them; they were impenitent, and he wept over their devoted city. The tears he shed over lost souls were full of pathos; and they justify the conclusion, that Christians have reason to fear whenever their labour for

perishing sinners is bounded by any thing but their capabilities.

On all these points our danger is increased by the variety of our inducements to neglect. Indolence prevails to a vast extent ; the fear of man will often bring its snare ; worldly interests oppose us, and we are fearful ; the dread of singularity will often stop our mouths and tie our hands ; false views of Christian charity lead to mutual compromise, as though there could be any love in rendering each other's damnation sure. Fondness for party feeling, worldly encumbrances and ambition ; in a word, means of self-deception, are prepared by the enemy of souls on every hand. Whatever the delusion, our danger is the same. When men die in their iniquity through our neglect, God has declared that he will require their blood at our hands.

3. *Let us, therefore, consider the punishment of this sin.*

The first part of this punishment is *a decided expression of Divine displeasure.*

The prophet feared God. Through all his labour and sufferings he had no such source of

comfort as that which the approving smile of Jehovah supplied. With cheering and invigorating energy, this fell on his fainting spirit like light from heaven, and was rendered still more attractive and refreshing through the dreadful gloom with which, by his judgments, God was encompassing the scene of its manifestation. The peace which it produced was so contrasted with surrounding terrors as to make it exceedingly precious. Hence, when his mind rested on the objects of vengeance, their fearful calamity was filled with admonition to himself. They might not have long to live; but if, in that short space, he ceased to warn them through neglect, the prophet was made to feel that he must take his station by their side, and sit or fall, himself, beneath the frown of the Almighty.

How dreadful are the fruits of infidelity! yet this is the very spirit of his law. In word, or deed, or thought, the Father of our mercies has no delight in the neglects and indifference of the disobedient. He will sympathize with his servants in their sorrow; he will pity their embarrassments; he will remember that they

are but dust; and when they are fainting through weakness in the path of duty, he will uphold them by his own omnipotent power; but he has no pleasure in their negligence. When they cease to feel compassion for perishing sinners, he will cease to pity them. This is the spirit of his law, and the Gospel adds, "Ought not thou also to have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?" Those who refuse to speak unto the wicked, therefore, to warn him, to save his life, if permitted still to live, must live bereaved of the Redeemer's approbation, and covered with the marks of Divine displeasure.

Secondly: A further punishment will be found *in the ruinous consequences of neglect: the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity.*

Ezekiel's commission was only one part of God's dispensations: the other part consisted in all those arrangements which were made for the purpose of bringing wrath upon Israel. Each wicked man was assailed in two ways: mercy approached him through the prophet, but judgment by the hand of Providence. His living in iniquity could not be allowed; he must

either forsake it or he must die in his iniquity. A warning voice is sent to prove that events are rapidly advancing towards a crisis; he must speedily repent, or no space for repentance will be allowed. On the use which is made of this warning, it may be a single one, the alternative between life and death is absolutely suspended. If it reach his ear, and does not change his heart, he dies through his own impenitence: if, through neglect in the prophet, the warning does not reach his ear, or reaches him but indistinctly, the sins of the wicked remain, and for these he dies; *but the crash of his ruin will sound heavily on the prophet's ear.*

All men shall finally acknowledge that the judgments of Jehovah are righteous; and to those who are kept faithful to the end, there shall be revealed in them so much perfection and love, that they shall admire and praise his judgments for ever and ever. By this they shall realize a feeling, the majesty of which we are, at present, unable to comprehend; but there must be an incomprehensible anguish in the thought that this vast ruin, which every

where extends into infinity, was once suspended on *a word*, or *an act* in which we had been unfaithful. We instinctively shudder and shrink from that wreck of nature which a lost soul presents, even to our imperfect vision, in the present life: how then shall a Christian bear to gaze on the vast but minute revelation of that wretchedness which the clearer light of eternity shall set before him; while conscience shall pronounce its burning testimony to the fact, that the only probable prevention of all this endless, incurable, unconsolable misery was once committed into his hands, and treated with indifference? Oh! sirs, the fountain of our sensibilities must be all dried up before such a thought can cease to be afflictive.

The words are intended to appeal to our better feelings; *that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity*. But what is that to a worldly or malignant spirit? When the danger of souls is presented to men of such a character, they will exclaim, "O, let them die! am I my brother's keeper?" but to one in whose breast the emotions of vital godliness are awakened, in the least degree, this would be impossible

He may be induced to neglect the souls of men, but he cannot despise their ruin. Whilst the inducements to supineness are about him, he may be awfully insensible to the progress of Divine judgment; but when they are removed, his soul will tremble. He is therefore urged to consider, before the catastrophe transpires, what will be the bitterness of his own anguish when he looks on the irrecoverable ruin it produces, and thinks on his own neglect. If Jesus poured out his tears, and bitterly exclaimed, "Oh! that thou hadst known!" when he saw the city in which he sacrificed himself doomed to destruction; and if Dives could pray in hell for his brothers on earth, what can be the nature of that grief with which a Christian shall see the objects of his criminal indifference sink into perdition, and retire with his hands on his head, exclaiming, "Oh! that I had not neglected thine admonition, nor stained my hands in thy dreadful doom."

Thirdly: A further punishment will be found in the dreadful requisition, "*His blood will I require at thine hand.*"

One part of this requisition is founded in the

claim of Deity. Jehovah is Lord of all; he hath made all men of one flesh, that each man may show forth his praise: every ruined soul, therefore, is to him a lost servant; and, as in the affairs of men, a master demands satisfaction for the life of his slave, so God will demand satisfaction whenever a rebellious servant is ruined by our neglect: he will vindicate it as an injury done to himself.

Another part of the requisition is founded in the rights of creatures. God is judge of all. Acting in this character, he claims for each a reparation of all injuries. The sinner, over whom his wrath is gathering, is one party; the fellow-sinner, to whom the merciful warning was committed, is a second party. By concealing the truth, or by delivering it with unfaithfulness, he has injured his fellow-sinner through diminishing his advantages; and God will require a reparation of the injury, in all the terror of his judgment.

The character of this requisition will be awfully manifest if we only contemplate the high estimation in which God has held the souls thus neglected. To save them from ruin, he

gave his only 'begotten Son ; to enlarge the space for their repentance, forbearing mercy daily unfolds its vast magnificence. When we meditate on these wonders of love, they overpower our thoughts : but they all enhance the terror of that requisition. Whenever the injured majesty of God requires reparation, how helplessly we fall under the all-atoning blood of Jesus. Nothing but its perfect provisions can meet our necessity ; and when we stand amidst the ruins of our fellow-men, how all our strength is reduced to perfect weakness. The chamber of affliction, as it appears on earth, despises our utmost capabilities. The demands of heaven, and the necessities of earth, when they are urged on our poverty of resources, destroy our hopes. How dreadful, then, will be that voice which urges, in judgment, an unfaithful Christian to give satisfaction for a ruined servant to the King of kings, and to restore to a soul, now sunk into perdition, the space and opportunity for repentance, which were lost through his guilty neglect !

The truth which this passage teaches us is, that mercy, as God reveals it to sinful men,

even when shown in the lowest degree, (which is that of warning sinners of approaching ruin,) bestows new privileges on the guilty, and entails new duties on his people; and when they neglect those duties which thus originate in his *unmerited mercy*, he most solemnly admonishes his servants that he will demand *from them a full satisfaction on the principles of justice, and under the frown of his displeasure.*

Some considerations that may explain the righteousness of God in executing this law, will follow in subsequent chapters: at present, therefore, it will be sufficient to make two practical observations:

First. The law which has been explained *should lead to serious and faithful self-examination.*

Christians should always be careful for the sincerity of their faith, and their progress in holiness; but when this is secured in the completeness of personal religion, they have a further solicitude which concerns their conduct to the souls of men. With this law before their eyes, it would be madness to neglect so great a responsibility. If conscious that they

love the Saviour, they must also ask if they love the souls of unregenerated men; whether that love is as fervent, as compassionate, and as practical as God will require and approve. To pass the judgment of men is not enough; we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. What account shall we present there? Will he approve our faithfulness in warning the sinner to save his life? Christian, does thine own heart approve it? If not, God is greater than thine heart, and he knoweth all things.

Secondly. The law which has been explained teaches us *where we may hope for peace in reference to lost souls.*

Not in evasion, for God is judge; not in mere possibilities of personal safety, for we must be saved as by fire, and the alternative is dreadful;—but in the *impossibility* of our falling under this *dreadful requisition*. Hence, there is more peace in this world for those who feel perpetual exhaustion in the work of God, than there is for those who seek after ease, spiritual luxury, and self-indulgence, that may by Infinite mercy be forgiven. The most de-

voted are always the most happy. Consistency will also facilitate the exercise of faithfulness ; for, when once the truth has been explained to an unregenerate sinner, the silent compassionate look of a consistent reprover will constitute the most solemn warning. To this, therefore, let each Christian constantly aspire ; for there is a peace passing all understanding to be gained when our efforts to save the souls of men are measured by our capabilities, and when prayerful consistency has rendered our silent example a living and resistless admonition to the world.

THE REVELATION OF WRATH.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN MAKING
REQUISITION FOR NEGLECTED SOULS AS IT
IS SEEN IN THE CLAIMS OF HUMANITY.

“The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.”—PSALM ix. 17.

“Except a man be born again he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”—JOHN iii. 3.

THE Gospel is distinguished by perfect originality. It not only contains new combinations of truth: nothing that had ever entered the heart of man has any comparison with it in glory; and some of its principles were never thought of by any creature until they were revealed. From the beginning they were hid in God. Proceeding from his throne, the

blessed truths fell on our darkened world, like the first beam of morning which rested on unformed chaos at Creation; for, "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Such a blessing could never reach this earth without greatly changing its condition. It conferred new benefits on the guilty; and entailed new duties on its peculiar recipients; when these are properly regarded, it becomes a savour of life unto life—when they have been despised, it is made a savour of death unto death. This Gospel cannot reach this earth, or any part of it, without diminishing the woes of men, and securing for them eternal life; or else it will increase their sorrow, and fix their irrecoverable ruin everlastingly.

We must not stay to consider here the benefits bestowed by Gospel mercy on guilty men; our attention must be rather fixed on *some peculiar duties it entails on its recipients*. In general, it appeals to our whole nature; gives new objects to every desire; and new

motives for all activities. But the object of our study will be greatly facilitated, if the thought be fixed on that benevolent exercise of the mind which we call *humanity*. This consists in a sensitive and vigorous sympathy with mankind in the sorrows incident to human existence. The tendency of that principle is to make every thing important which relates to human happiness or misery ; and the laws of humanity require that no case of real calamity, when known to an individual, be passed without receiving all the assistance and attention which it was possible to render. God has established this law in our nature in order that every man may be like the good Samaritan.

All the calamities of life appeal to this principle of humanity, in those who are able to relieve the sufferers. But the Gospel appeals to this same principle, in the bosom of its recipients, by unfolding a greater calamity than could be endured in this life—the *final punishment of sin*. This is a woe that exceeds all other woes. By this appeal, the Gospel presents a new sphere in which humanity is to be cherished. All men who are not abandoned

will do it in respect to the body; but the Christian cherishes a sensitive humanity for the souls of men. Sinners will take care of time; but saints are bound to be compassionate for eternity. Hence it is said, "He that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

The punishment of that sin has already been explained; we shall now consider the righteousness of that punishment, as it appears in the principles of humanity. Our argument may be stated in a single sentence: first, the neglect of souls is an inexcusable offence; and, secondly, reparation of the injury it occasions is the least that could be demanded in its punishment. Both these positions we shall endeavour to explain:—

I. The inexcusable guilt of neglecting the souls of men will be seen from three considerations.

1. Their calamity has been clearly revealed.
2. Their calamity has been painfully felt.
3. The delay of its consummation is their only hope.

Let these facts be considered more particularly.

First. For a Christian to neglect the souls of men is an inhuman and inexcusable offence, *because their calamity and danger are so fully revealed.*

The Lord hath said unto them, "Ye shall surely die. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness of men, and all who hold the truth in unrighteousness." If these passages, and others of the same kind, had applied to only a few cases of ancient atrocity, we should have little cause for fear: but the same authority declares that all have sinned. On this rests the Lord's requirement of regeneration. The Gospel has therefore placed in clearest light the fact, that every child of man must either be born from above or perish everlastingly. Here the most gross and the most refined are on the same level. This vital change involves the safety of every soul. What a horrifying spectacle, then, is that presented to an eye of faith by the world of unregenerated men. If we could stand on the borders of perdition, and see the souls that hourly pass from this fallen earth, what millions might we number of immortal spirits, which

are constantly augmenting the inhabitants of hell. In their destruction there is nothing trivial. Their numbers exceed enumeration, and the bitterness of their woe is inconceivable. This endless ruin may not stir the compassion of other men, because they do not know, or do not believe it; but the Christian, who believes the book of God, will find it written there on every page. To him, therefore, the calamity is known, and should be pitied. He sees the plague spot on his fellows in sin, and humanity requires him to give the alarm.

But it is not the mere declaration of Scripture which speaks to a believer's heart. On this great question he is surrounded with many witnesses. Raised in the sight of Divine revelation, every event in Providence, and every fact in the natural history of human woe, is pregnant with profound and solemn truth. In his estimation, nothing can be regarded as accidental. Physical and moral causes are alike ordained by God. The ills of life, and the pains of death, are equally traced to the existence of sin. When he sees the wide extending curse resting on all that is visible to

him here, the Christian is bound to consider this, as it really is, the beginning of wrath to come. When he looks back on what has transpired upon this earth, as though in utter contempt of its Creator's smile: what misery has resulted from His munificent love—the history of this world presents to a believer nothing but one continued and complicated experiment of rebellion or of obedience. The result of this experiment of sin unfolds its malignity, appealing to humanity in its present consequences, but pointing to a still more powerful appeal in the world to come. Sinners may talk of their levities and their happiness; but the Christian looks at their perdition. War may have its boasted victories; but he looks over the long and bloody catalogue of its slaughters—and weeps. Intemperance may have its moments of exhilaration and jollity; but he considers the days of languishing that follow it, amidst the ruin of households, the groanings of the hospital, the ravings of the madhouse, the remorse of a prison, and the agonies of death. Sinful pleasure may have its moment of laughter; but every enlightened

mind knows that it is vain ; and that the whole creation groans beneath this bondage, waiting for its fiery redemption. The whole course of sinful society appears to him like the waters of a river, which are constantly rushing towards the vortex of a whirlpool. The souls that are drawn into its eddy, sink by millions before his eyes. They may be deluded ; but the height of their delusion is the height of their calamity. He knows their danger, and humanity itself requires him to rescue as many as he possibly can.

Secondly. The neglect of this duty is still more inexcusable, *because the danger of unconverted souls has been felt by Christians in their own experience.*

Men are never entitled to the name of Christians until they have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them in the Gospel. But why did they fly for refuge ? Because they were made to feel that without this salvation they must perish. When this fact is forced home on a sinner's heart, his anguish is often indescribable. Nature becomes faint under a load of guilt, which nothing can

remove but Almighty mercy. From week to week, and from year to year, the wounded spirit groans for its deliverance. A foretaste is thus realized of the great common calamity. At length the Holy Spirit administers peace through the blood of atonement. Great is the joy thus produced. It seems too good to be true; but it is established through the covenant of grace. The sinner is delivered and healed. But this deliverance is not given to dry up the sympathies of the soul. All the discipline through which the sinner passed was intended to make him feel, by experience, the need of sovereign grace; to deepen his conception of this world's misery; and to make him see in its degradation other objects on which to determine the compassion of his breast. He is saved, that he may become a benefactor to his companions in guilt. His life is redeemed from destruction, that his days may be spent in works of mercy. A warning voice prevented his destruction, that he might warn and rescue others; and humanity itself is outraged, when he refuses to speak, and

warn those in whose calamity and sin he had been himself so extensively involved.

This part of the argument is greatly strengthened by the atonement of our Lord ; by it he assails the two great errors which lead men into sin, and keep them there. First : they laugh at sin itself, and call it a trifle. Secondly : they laugh at its judgment, and say, "Tush,—God doth not see." On Calvary the facts of the case are clearly revealed ; for though sin may sometimes wear a mild and pleasing appearance, covering its operation with deep concealment, and with warm expressions of love for God and man, its malignity is made perfectly manifest when he who could not compromise with its folly, notwithstanding his Infinite perfection and love, is not only rejected, but persecuted, insulted, and crucified as one that was accursed. Sinful men may have many pleasing words, but this reveals their hearts, and sets before the mind of a believer the awful possibilities of human crime.

So, also, with respect to the punishment of sin. Divine forbearance is often misconstrued

into indifference. Hence, sinners become bold in crime; and because judgment for an evil work is not speedily executed, the heart of man is fully set in him to do evil. The Cross confounds this error. It proves that, how long and mysterious soever Divine forbearance may be, his wrath, when once he has determined on its execution, will crush the whole fabric of the human constitution, and grind its victim into powder. The courage and strength of man will be useless then. Body and soul shall both sink in absolute ruin. Sin and its consequences are thus placed before the Christian by that very instrument which secures his life and peace, in order that humanity may be roused within him, and strengthen every other inducement to activity in diminishing its dreadful triumphs: for every impenitent sinner must fall under woes more hopeless and bitter to him than those which our Lord endured.

3. This neglect of souls is still more inexcusable, *because the delay of vengeance comprises all the sinner's hope.*

Nothing can be more uncertain than life, while death is sure to all the sons of men.

This often forces the affairs of mankind to extremity, but nothing gives these facts so much solemnity as judgment after death. No space will be found for repentance, therefore, but in this uncertain earthly being. Time, with its steadfast progress, wastes the sinner's days, and, at the end of them, he sinks into despair and ruin. The end comes upon him like a thief in the night, and steals away every possibility of deliverance; while every hour of continued impiety increases the difficulty, and diminishes the probability of conversion. In the case of impenitent men, therefore, delay is destruction. They do not feel it,—the world does not feel it,—but the Christian knows it, and he ought to feel it. Humanity should make him consider that the sinners he neglects must speedily be changed or lost.

The case would be widely different if, after death, another chance remained; but we know of no purgatory beyond the grave. Sin can be purged here in the fountain of mercy, but there it will meet with nothing but vengeance. That which is here enjoyed, is the only opportunity of gaining everlasting life. No promise

will reach the spirit in perdition ;—there is no way of escape in hell. All that the soul can enjoy or suffer, hangs on the thread of this mortal life : and shall the deluded victims of iniquity go out of it unwarned and uninstructed, without any persuasion to fly from the wrath to come? O Lord, forbid—stir up in thy people an ardent zeal, that they may labour for souls as those that must give an account.

The force of this argument depends not so much on the facts of the case as upon the clear knowledge which Christians possess, both of the facts and their consequences. To neglect a *known case of sorrow and ruin* is to violate the laws of humanity. This, then, is a known case of sorrow and ruin. It is ruin the most perfect, of body and of soul ; it is known both by revelation and experience. The absolute dependence of eternal interests on the use of a most uncertain period of Divine forbearance is not only known, but Christians in sorrow derive from that very uncertainty a source of consolation, because they know that life must soon end, and that their sorrows will then cease ; and yet this uncertain scrap of time, which

they hope will soon end in glory, is wasted in neglecting those who have only this same uncertain period in which to escape the eternal burnings. Still this is not the full extent of this evil. Some are better taught, and others are more accustomed to dwell on the complete ruin of the fall; and yet these are often the last to warn the wicked. The learned are above it, and the others are so anxious for strong consolation that they cannot warn the wicked. One, enriched with learning and refined in taste, and the other enriched with more complete conceptions of sovereign mercy, though both bound by their high advantage to more devotedness, found their excuses on the very gift of Heaven, and destroy all excuse for their negligence by the nature of the apology they offer for their crime.

In such a case it is necessary to say but little *respecting the nature of its punishment*.

For, in the ancient law of God, the rule of equal retribution is applied, even to the least offences; "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." In the injuries respecting property a fourfold retribution was exacted; and in mur-

der, blood for blood. God does not give *this law* the character of a vindictive judgment, but merely requires reparation of injury. The requisition is dreadful, merely from the nature of the subject. But this was known before the offence was committed. Ezekiel knew the terror of his God, and the danger of his country. Proof after proof was placed before him, to make him feel and know that the wicked must die. Christians are in the same condition. They know that the souls which are neglected are immortal ; they know that the salvation of these souls is precious, and will cease for ever. With these things before their eyes, and supported by their own reasonings, they neglect them. It is no sin of ignorance, or of accident, but a deliberate offence against the clearest knowledge. Nothing can be so inexcusable, whenever it occurs ; and no punishment can be more mild than that of reparation.

Besides, whatever the suffering inflicted by this *dreadful requisition*, its amount can bear no proportion to that which is occasioned by individual neglect. One faithful and diligent Christian may be the means of rescuing many

from perdition. Witness the labours of Paul ; and, in modern times, those of Whitfield. A single blind man, with many afflictions, and in deep poverty, by diligent devotedness, was made the happy instrument of establishing four churches of Christ, and was followed to his grave by hundreds who were blessed through his exertions. So the neglect of one will be often felt by multitudes. A household, a town, a nation, may be injured by his negligence. The fatal consequence descends from age to age, extending beyond the limit of human calculation.

And further, there is no proportion between the objects which induce the neglect of souls and the joy which results from fidelity. Ease is only an approximation towards non-existence ; worldly acquisitions are only multiplied solitudes ; and useless learning, though acquired with infinite toil, and idolized by vain men, will all amount to nothing when, in the world of spirits, we shall see as we are seen, and know even as we are known. But then the joy of seeing souls rescued from death through his instrumentality, will be, to every Christian,

inconceivable. Earth has no blessedness with which it can be compared. By this the faithful servant shall enter into the joy of his Lord, and those who turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever. What reprehension can be too severe for him who, knowingly, resigns this glory and joy for any sinful gratification that hell could invent or earth supply.

It is not my province to describe the execution of this law, much less to impeach individuals; my duty is merely to show with what righteous solemnities Christians have to deal; and there are several practical cases in which these thoughts should be carefully kept in mind.

First. *In the chamber of affliction.*

Here we are often tempted to withhold the warning voice. The patient is already distressed, and nature seems unable to bear an additional burden. But this is often a mistake; for disease itself would, in many cases, disappear, if that heavy and undefined sorrow which sin has laid upon the heart could be by any means removed. Harshness, in any instance,

can never be justified ; but faithfulness may be made more comforting than flattery or indifference. But, should the case be desperate, humanity itself might ask, whether it would not be better for the sufferer to feel his danger for a moment, than for him to endure everlasting burnings ? If thou warn him not, his affliction proves, that the wicked man *will soon die in his iniquity.*

Secondly. *In the correction of youth,* severity, as well as warning, is often needful.

When demanded from parents and friends its infliction is painful. This will add to the force of every other inducement to unfaithful compromise. At such a time this dreadful requisition should lie upon the heart. Consider the result to which this levity may lead. If that unchastised child should die in his iniquity, what will his faithless parent feel when God shall, frowning on his spirit, say, “ His blood will I require at thine hand.”

Thirdly. *In dealing with distressed inquirers* fidelity is needful.

For much of the anguish connected with the new birth arises from the love of sin and an

unwillingness to submit to the "righteousness of God." All this must be resigned. Before a sinner can find peace, he must rest on Christ alone. The presumption of nature must be dislodged, or the man will die in his iniquity. Painful as it must be, to make the grief more pungent, the warning voice must not be withheld. A dreadful curse is denounced against that false physician who healed the daughter of his people slightly, crying, "Peace, peace, when there was no peace." God will have the heart before he saves the soul. Humanity itself, therefore, should make us tremble over every imperfection in the work of grace.

Fourthly. *In reproofing flagrant and hardened sinners.*

Disgust, the fear of insult, and a dread of failure, will often tempt a Christian to let them alone; but success has often attended the most discouraging attempts. This, however, is not all. If they will not hear the admonition, mercy is magnified. Paul was thus free from the blood of all men. By this he obtained a great advantage, both in time and eternity. His peace was made more permanent, and in

the final judgment it will be with vastly different feelings that men will witness the condemnation of those who rejected their reproof, and those whom they neglected to admonish. If Paul could rise again, and, standing amidst the ruins of Athens, view the long train of judgments that have reduced it to its present desolation, he would feel a holy satisfaction in knowing, that when he before stood on Mars' hill, he did what he could for its reformation and deliverance. But, if he had then neglected their reproof, the scattered fragments of its former greatness, which are treasured up by all the civilized nations of Europe, would every where cry out against him for his infidelity.

Lastly. *In improving unexpected opportunities for useful labour.*

These demand promptness and vigorous prudence; for they often pass away before they are discovered, and leave us no room to expect their repetition. I will just illustrate this particular by stating a fact.

Some years since, when residing in a village many miles from London, I was one morning called very early to converse with a dying fe-

male. The person I had seen before, and made what effort I could to direct her thoughts to the Redeemer, but without any effect. I was now putting on my clothes to sit down to my studies. As I was not dressed for the day, I thought I might take the time necessary for completing that process. It might have been fifteen minutes before I reached the house. She died as I entered the door. As I fixed my eye on the corpse, which still seemed to breathe, and on which a most awful expression of solicitude was left, this passage came upon my mind, "The door was shut." At that moment, I would have given all the world contained if I could have recalled those fifteen minutes, which might have been spent in prayer by her side. Oh, sirs! I desire never to feel that emotion again, and should rejoice if its influence could be done away for ever, excepting as its painful recollection may form an incentive to augmented fidelity and zeal.

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THE SOCIAL CONFLICT.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN MAKING
REQUISITION FOR NEGLECTED SOULS, AS IT
IS SEEN IN THE PRINCIPLES WHICH REGU-
LATE SOCIETY.

“Return to thine own house, and show how great things
the Lord hath done for thee.”—LUKE viii. 38, 39.

How natural is the desire expressed by this poor man, when delivered from the power of Satan. His captivity was full of misery, and marked with the deepest degradation: but a few hours before, possessed by many devils, he raged with madness, writhed with suffering, shrunk from society, and lived in the tombs among the bodies of the dead: he was now

rescued, restored to his right mind, blessed with peace, and sitting at the feet of Jesus; and he *besought* his Lord that he might b with him, to find a continuation of joy in the nearest intercourse with his benefactor. Such is the desire of converted men; for, when the joy of salvation has been realized, nature would pray for its uninterrupted consolations, and long to leave all earthly scenes and responsibilities, that this might be inherited without intermission.

Jesus, at present, forbids the gratification of his wishes. He will not always do so; but he forbids it now, and sends the man home to his own house that his kindred might hear from him how great things the Lord hath done for him. By this act our Lord evolves a general rule observed in the government of his Gospel kingdom. Every servant whom he receives must decidedly reject the dominion of Satan in this world; but Jesus will not have him forsake the station which Providence has assigned him in it. The father must be a father still, and the mother a mother to her own babes; the brother continues to be a brother,

the sister a sister ; the master is still a master, the servant a servant ; from the king to the meanest subject every righteous relationship remains unaltered by conversion. The Christian must remain *in* the world, though not *of* the world. The object of this arrangement is to warn the wicked to save their lives, and to proclaim, by his labour and example, how great things the Lord hath done for him, that they may know what great things the Lord is willing to do for them.

The neglect of this duty, in any case, has been proved to be a sin for which, in the judgment, no excuse will be admitted ; and the dreadful requisition for this sin, has also been explained. We have now to consider the righteousness of that requisition, as it is proved by *the principles which govern our social existence*. The *argument* will be stated in few words, and then the conclusion will be corroborated by several facts that appear in the Gospel dispensation.

1. The argument which proves *the guilt* of neglecting the souls of men, includes two particulars.

First. By the laws of our social existence

we are bound to provide and to be careful for the interests of our own-households, relations, and dependents; for he that provideth not for his own house hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel. To this point all the instincts of our nature lead, and by this rule all society is held together; but,

Secondly. The interests of no family can be secured amidst the corruptions and follies of an unregenerated and unadmonished world. Husbands, wives; parents, children, brothers, sisters, and friends must all mingle with society as it is, and the men of this world must come in contact with them. If in this contact the wicked are not warned of their wickedness and danger, they gain, from this very silence, a power which fearfully aids them in diffusing the contamination of their sin; and therefore,

Thirdly. To neglect the admonition of sinners is to forsake the interests of our own homes, families, and friends; for where will your children live, in their maturity, but in the midst of that corruption which has ripened through your neglect? If some poor broken-

hearted mother, who has long lamented the ruin of her own child, could rise up now and elucidate this thought, she would unfold a tale whose lightest circumstance would harrow up your souls, and whose result would perfectly confound the elements of thought in overpowering sympathy.

2. The argument to prove the mildness of the retribution is still more concise ; for,

First, the laws of society require that interests, when injured, should be repaired by those who inflicted the injury ; but, secondly, by the neglect of souls, all interests are injured, and society itself is driven to perdition. This is an injury which includes all injuries, a sin that includes all sins ; and further,

Thirdly, the peculiar calamity results not from the law of God, but from the nature of the case. An injured house is soon repaired,—property, when wasted, may be replaced,—a wound in the body may soon be healed ; hence, to require a reparation of injury, in these cases, is not so dreadful ; but when a soul is injured, neglected, ruined, and rendered a pest to society, to demand reparation from the sinner

who neglected it, is to load him with a burden by which he is instantly crushed: but the value of that soul, and the nature of that pest were known to him before he neglected his fellow-sinner. With these things before his eyes, the faithless Christian cherished his criminal indifference. He looked on with coldness when he knew that the man must die in his iniquity; he, therefore, cannot plead the depth of his calamity as a ground of acquittal in the day of God. Whatever befalls him, he cannot sink lower than the victim of his folly and crime. Hear thou, therefore, the word of the Lord: "*If I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die, and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.*"

The principles of Divine government are intended for universal application: we must not be surprised, therefore, if, in tracing them, we find that they extend on every side unto infinity. But, since the conclusion here is very

dreadful, let us see whether there be any thing to corroborate it in the Gospel system.

In the first place, then, it would seem as though God intended to observe this rule in his judgment, because *in the Gospel he has given a further confirmation of all social and domestic duties.*

They are founded in our nature, and enforced in the law of Moses ; but there is a delicacy, amplification, and fervency in recording these duties in the Gospel, which we cannot find in any other dispensation. Nor is it by precept alone that they are urged on every individual. Our Saviour's life is a living law, where we may see our duty in every relationship, with more distinctness than it can be written with words. He stands before us in the station we occupy, and presents a posture of obedience which doctrinal statement never could supply. His language is, " Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one jot or tittle of the law shall fail." Hence, we are bound to infer, that whatever duty can be properly deduced from the principles which regulate our social existence, must stand confirmed by the Gospel of

Christ; and that whatever punishment God has denounced against the neglect of a duty so entailed on his people, will still be exacted in the judgment. Such then is the duty of admonishing the wicked, and the punishment of their criminal neglect; and, consequently, the apostle reprehends a want of natural affection as a crime, and places such a sinner with whoremongers, murderers, sodomites, and stealers of mankind.

Secondly. The Gospel strengthens our conclusion by *revealing more distinctly the objects for social solicitude and zeal.*

Nature itself teaches the lowest animals to provide for the necessities of their young, and others roam in groups for mutual defence. This instinct, aided by intelligence and experience, will induce a parent to seek the earthly welfare of his children; it is nature's voice within him. By this he is often led to consider the alternative between their starvation or support—their danger or protection—their ignorance or instruction—their dishonour or respectability. None of these are removed by the Gospel; but it presents another question

which appeals to the same natural affection. It teaches the father to consider whether the child will be saved or ruined. This is a question which absorbs all other interests, because it involves the happiness of time and the rewards of eternity. If God had not intended to act upon this law, he would never have unfolded this vast necessity, which appeals to every heart, and invites the sympathies of all relationships; for it is not the cause of children merely, it is blended with all the interests of our being. The parent, the brother, and the friend are either in a state of safety or of danger; for every individual of our species must either be born again or lost for ever. This fact is written as with a sunbeam upon the sacred page, that every servant of the living God may feel its importance, and labour to supply the emergency which it creates.

Thirdly. That God will reprehend the infidelity of his servants in this particular is further proved by *the peculiar motives to faithfulness supplied in the Gospel system.*

Let the attention be fixed here on the mixed nature of human society. Converted men are

not removed to heaven immediately after their hearts are changed: they continue on earth still; and whilst they remain, they are not placed in any separate country. The same cities, towns, and houses, have within them both saints and sinners. All parties are thus brought into constant and inevitable contact. By this contact each man acts upon his neighbour: hence proceeds the spiritual warfare, not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places. Men of this world use their influence in favour of its sinful customs, but men of God use theirs in advancing the reign of holiness, truth, and mercy.

Human affairs do not present a single position from which so magnificent a display of mental and moral energy is presented to an observing mind as that which is exhibited here. Could we be placed on some neutral ground from which the whole machinery of hell could be viewed, its construction and extent would fill the mind with utter astonishment. Inducements to sin are provided for every modification of taste and character, from the most illiterate

and mean to the most refined and exalted. They appeal to every sense ; they are modified by the circumstances of every age ; they employ the most astonishing resources ; they are guided by immense wisdom, and sustained by prodigious activity. Our world is thus made the theatre on which a warfare is maintained with the most relentless and malignant perseverance, presenting an unity of design and uniformity of operation which have, since the fall of man, succeeded in spoiling the felicity of our species, defacing the whole natural creation, and in turning the mercy of Jehovah itself into poisonous pollution.

To illustrate this position we might turn to two classes of facts, which meet an observer in every part of our Christian society. One exhibits the operations and plans which are altogether bad ; the other, a prostitution of providential arrangements originally intended for the improvement of society.

Under the former head may be placed those splendid, but horrible establishments in the metropolis, called *hells* or gaming-houses ; in which is employed an enormous capital, and

round which, pervading all classes of society, lurk an immense crowd of abandoned wretches, whose daily bread is obtained by the debauch and ruin of young men. Not a single night passes in which some fortune is not wrecked, or some character ruined, by their baneful instrumentality. Other establishments are maintained for the purpose of destroying the chastity of females, and making them the instruments in defiling the other sex. Agents from these haunts of crime may be found through all the empire, entrapping the unwary, and leading them to death. These two kinds of pernicious agency may properly be styled *missionaries of perdition*; for the vigour and vigilance of their aggressive operation on virtuous society more than exceed any thing that exists in the Church of Christ, amongst all that is devised for the rescue of souls. A third kind of establishments is found in theatres, and houses kept for the sale of liquors and beer; all which have this in common, that they are necessary to the operation of gaming-houses and the brothel. One's heart might bleed at the most superficial view which can be

taken of their pernicious influence in facilitating the ruin of mankind. Subordinate to these, and wheresoever youth are congregated for instruction or amusement, itinerating or located instruments of pollution are every where found pervading our cities, universities, towns, hamlets, and assailing the society of home, living like vultures on what they can destroy, or on what has been destroyed, and leaving the spawn of their uncleanness in the palaces of kings, and every habitation of mankind, from the royal house to the meanest cottage.

When the proportion of human instrumentality thus employed is well considered, the spectacle will be appalling ; yet the facts are more dreadful than any superficial observer can conceive. Moreover, there is a vast extent of operation intended to correct the evil, but which, like icebergs thrown across the channel of a river, melt into, and increase the torrent. Besides that dreadful victory, by which Satan has succeeded in prostituting the instinctive endearments of so many females, to the pollution of that society which they were born to purify, to elevate, to adorn, and bless ; let the

thought rest for one moment on the moral influence of Government, and the effect of corrupted religious establishments. Both these were intended for good; and, by virtue of this aim, they still exist. But what is often found to be their real effect? Governments, by corruption, have frequently *legalized* crime, and thus swollen its torrents immeasurably. Corrupt religious establishments have *canonized* crime, enshrining its form in the sanctuary. I look at nothing here in a political point of view, but merely as it affects the danger or safety of souls. And who can estimate the moral and spiritual devastations that have resulted from legalized drunkenness in the sale of cheap gin and in the licensing of beer-shops? The increase of our revenue from that source proves most bitterly the influence of our law in the diffusion of misery and crime. What language can paint the augmentation of guilt before God which has accumulated in this and other lands through the legalization of a slave trade? or of slavery? or through the legalized and exterminating courses which still maintain our colonial system; beneath which, in Asia,

Africa, and America, nations, larger than our own, are daily sinking by pollution and war to utter extirpation ? The legalization of war itself is a triumph of infernal policy, by which every other kind of sin is guarded and strengthened in its operation. But, to turn for a moment to the other object : we there see the bread of life which came down from heaven changed into virulent poison ; for a corrupted religious establishment, not only lends its aid in favour of those legalized sins which exist in the land which upholds and uses it, but it originates new kinds of sinful evasion and error, which *drown men* in perdition. What, for instance, must be the wide-spread ruin of souls, which, from generation to generation, has continued to prevail over Christian nations, since the churches by law established learned to teach that *baptism* is *regeneration*, and that a physical sacrament would be taken in the judgment, instead of that spiritual change of heart which Jesus required of Nicodemus ? This delusion may be more mild ; but *if Christ be true*, it is more destructive than all the wars that have ever raged amongst mankind, or than all the other

follies that have been supported by unrighteous legislation. Ecclesiastical discords, of every kind, are subject to a similar remark. While party conflicts with party in the Church, dishonouring each other and their common Lord, there is nothing inactive in all the machinery of darkness, but every opportunity thus given is seized, and improved to terrible advantage, by the enemy of souls. Those bitter tears which Paul shed over Christian professors who were enemies to the cross of Christ, are poured out still by others who witness a similar perversion of privilege, and trace the same catastrophe continually resulting from the same fearful sin. Of men who indulge these errors no one ever perishes alone in his iniquity. By the eddy of his example others are drawn into the whirlpool of his ruin. But the repulsive character which the religion of Jesus is made to exhibit before a despising world is the greatest of all calamities. It sets the millions of our species on their defence against all the aggressive labour of the Church. Hence the pernicious folly of contests about power, or property, or dignity in the Church. These, when providentially

bestowed, may be useful to a few souls that come within the compass of their beneficial operation ; but the struggle for power, property, and dignity, by clothing the very name of religion with discredit, inflicts a calamity on the whole human race, which extends to unborn generations, and swells the catalogue of lost souls to a bulk which is inconceivable. By this means, the instruments of mercy are seized by her enemies, changed into implements of war, and turned against her own person. Jehovah is thus assailed by means of his own thunderbolts ; and the councils of the Most High, which were formed for the rescue of sinners, are turned into foolishness and insult, as though the final victory of sin were already sealed as certain.

To estimate the misery which is thus produced is beyond the reach of our imagination. Wide spaces exist upon our earth where this spiritual war was once maintained against mighty empires, which have now sunk into perdition ; and the very places that they formerly occupied are now desolate and bare, as though they had been swept by the besom of

destruction. It is almost more than nature can sustain to stand on these ruins of former greatness, and think how many precious souls have passed from them into Hell: yet this is trivial when we come to consider that this conflict of darkness has actually prevailed so far as to reduce the whole history of every nation on the globe to three parts:—its departure from God,—the completion of its sin,—and the execution of its judgment. Churches of every kind have been subject to the same influence, and sunk in the same ruin. No temple has ever yet been consecrated, to which pollution has not found access. The operation and advance of sin have all the essential characters of a fatal pestilence; which, infecting the very air of heaven, spreads over the whole space which is occupied by our species, descends into every human abode, and, with destructive subtilty, enters the very vitals of man;—producing, wherever it gains an ascendancy, accumulated guilt, lamentation, and woe.

Had the glorious Gospel of the blessed God never reached our earth, the result of this

spiritual war would have been a total destruction of our race. By this mysterious modification of Divine love, individual hearts are subdued, purged from pollution, and rescued from eternal ruin. By the change under which they pass, the diseased insensibility of nature is removed, and they are made to feel intensely the ruin that prevails around. A vivid sensibility results from the work of grace, which seems, at first, like a new faculty of the soul; through which, the interests of men become more endeared, the nature of sin is abhorred, and the destruction which follows it is regarded with deep compassion. Mercy, therefore, makes them feel more bitterly than those who perish, the painful character of their present state. But why is this? If God intends them to be healed, why must they continue where every thing they see or touch is polluted by the deadly pestilence? If he intends them to be safe, why are they continued in the very seat of this pernicious war?

The answers to these inquiries are concise, and greatly confirm the laws we have considered. God has purposes of grace towards

other sinners ; and those who have tasted his mercy, are continued here as agents in his work. They are the lights of the world, the messengers of mercy ; and God, by their instrumentality, is daily warning the wicked to save his life. This is their business upon earth, until Christ shall call them to his glory. Hence proceeds the peculiarity in their discipline. They have neither peace or safety but when they are actually in a state of aggression. If they do not approach sinners for their good, sinners will approach them for their harm. On earth there is no possibility of continued rest. Christians must conquer the powers of darkness, or the powers of darkness will conquer them. They must either rejoice over a flying enemy, or fly before their enemies with shame and miserable defeat.

Hence the sorrow which attends the neglect of souls, even in the present life. The indifference which is allowed with respect to others will soon extend to ourselves ; leanness comes over the soul,—ordinances become unproductive,—the word loses its living power,—faith becomes feeble,—we are estranged from fellow-

ship with God,—the consolations of the Spirit are few,—temptations strong, and often triumphant,—churches partake in the disease of individuals, and the daughters of Zion mourn as in the days of captivity :—on every side we see the hanging down of hands, the drooping of spirit, and the fall of saints. From all these things, we are bound to learn that God will not let his people rest in negligence. If the love of souls will not stir them, persecutions and calamity must; for earth is the scene of this spiritual war; and here, where men have sinned, Jehovah has decreed the manifestation of triumphant mercy.

On the other hand, nothing is more wonderful than the joy of true devotedness. It rises where least expected, and shines in the light of heaven. When deprived of all earthly comfort, and worn with incessant toil, the saints unfold a greatness more than mortal. A strong resemblance to their Lord destroys all suspicion of his favour. His smile rests upon their heart. Sin has no dominion over them; they go from conquering to conquer; and though on earth, they realize perpetual

foretastes of eternal joy, and seem already to hear the congratulation of judgment, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord."

Hence, the obligation by which we are bound to seek the conversion of sinners in our own circles. This is the peculiarly characteristic solicitude of a Christian. His eyes are opened to it by the light of Heaven. He must make other objects bend to this constantly, and absolutely. No worldly advantage should be allowed to interfere with this paramount design. To this he is consecrated; and motives to perseverance press from every side, and of every character.

Consider *this hopeful family*. The parents have been blessed with six children. They have health, and natural endowments, not superior to those which generally attend such circles. But, the parents have, ever since they expected the first child, considered how their offspring might be made happy with God. They have prayed for them daily ever since; they have laboured to set before them the best example; and the mother, especially, has la-

houred to explain to each the necessity of obedience to God, the change of its heart, and the happiness of true religion. The eldest child is about twelve years old, and already exhibits the hopeful blossoms of early piety; he is sometimes found retiring solemnly to offer up his youthful prayer to God. The mother has received his first confidential inquiries. She is full of hope. The younger children seem to follow in the same way; and when these two parents are together, looking at the bright unclouded sky before them, their joy unspeakable, might fill the coldest heart with zeal in copying their holy example.

On the other hand, my mind's eye rests on *an anxious family*. The parents have eight children, the oldest being about fifteen. The father and the mother are both pious; but they did not know the Lord until after their two eldest children were born. Their affections were very strong; and though they soon saw the necessity of conversion for each child, yet they had not skill to begin the work of correction perfectly, nor had they firmness to execute all they knew to be right. Their own examples,

before conversion, were not so good in spiritual things as was to be desired, and, altogether, the oldest boy is now unfolding indications that alarm. Hitherto, with her husband's help, the mother has kept him from any grievous harm ; but he does not like the restraints of virtue. His mother is very anxious, lest he should break through into rebellion. His example, too, has already affected the younger children ; and when the parents are together, watching the clouds which gather over them, *the bitterness of their solicitude* would make any one feel the importance of *early exertions*.

Thirdly. It would be well to look at this *distressed family*. There are ten of them in all. Three have, I trust, tasted that the Lord is gracious ; a fourth has made a profession ; one is almost indifferent to religion ; and the other three are ruined. The parents will sometimes meet with five children to pray for the other three. It is a piteous scene. Many tears have been shed around their altar, bitter and corrosive. To hear the groans of these two parents, growing quite old with grief, would seem enough to produce compassion in the

breast of Satan ; but they do not. Their tears are still shed ; and they will go down with sorrow to their graves, teaching all mankind the importance of early fidelity to their households.

Fourthly. There is still a deeper scene of sorrow before me—*it is a ruined family*. The father is a good man : he taught his children to read the Scriptures ; and, in their youth, to seek the Lord. But being much engaged in business, and trusting to the Spirit, without regarding sufficiently his parental duties ; he did not lead them to fear and love the Lord with all their hearts. They learned to talk on religious subjects without modesty, and to read the Bible without prayer. When they grew up, four of them made a profession of religion. One died in the faith. His youngest brother died in sin. The other three departed from the ways of God most awfully. Sorrow succeeded sorrow in rapid succession, like billows in a storm. When I saw him last, the old man was sinking with affliction of body and of soul. He seemed like a poor exhausted mariner who had escaped from the tempest alone ; and

seated on a rock, was looking with consternation on the wreck of all he had to love on earth. His soul was safe in the arms of sovereign mercy; but the ruin of his family was more than nature could sustain: it made him "love strangling rather than life."

In the last place: exactly the reverse of this, is the state of *a grateful and pious family*. A saving conversion to God has been sought by the parents here from before their children were born. They prayed for this as their best portion, and laboured for it incessantly. In all their pursuits, pleasures, business, and conversation; when any object presented itself before them, these parents would inquire, will this thing promote the conversion of our children? and, as the thing appeared to bear on this point, how important so ever in other respects, it was entertained or resigned. Their constant labour gave consistency to their prayers—and prayer secured a blessing on their labour. For, every child has grown to maturity in grace; and adorns the doctrine of God his Saviour. Peace prevails through the whole household; and they never meet but with

grateful joy. They are happy in the highest degree ; and the parents, now ripening in years, are waiting to pass over Jordan, cheered by the full conviction, that after being separated a little while, they will be permitted to welcome every child they nourished upon earth, into Heaven's everlasting glory.

By these examples, and such as these, God is continually appealing to the hearts of all his servants. Thus cheered by smiles of love, and warned by solemn admonitions, therefore, let all indifference be laid aside for ever. Assail the heart with all the vigour of aggressive mercy. So shall your joys be multiplied exceedingly ; and, sinners rescued from perdition, shall join you in praising your conquering Lord.

THE PROVISIONS OF MERCY.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN MAKING
REQUISITION FOR NEGLECTED SOULS, AS IT
IS SEEN IN THE PROVISIONS OF MERCY.

“Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges?”

1 COR. ix. 7.

THE Christian life is a warfare; and each member in the body of Christ, is required to sustain it against all the combined forces of earth and hell. Considering what they are, how numerous, experienced, and mighty, this duty must be attended with great labour and suffering. But no part of the Christian conflict appears, at first, so formidable as that which relates to the conversion of sinners. Jehovah frowns and

threatens them with death ; Satan deludes them and nourishes their crime, while their own hearts are full of enmity and rebellion. In such a state of things the courage of man positively fails, and often the most sincere will feel as though the utmost that can be expected from his inexperienced weakness, is continued faithfulness in himself, and a patient endurance till the end ; and hence, the aggressive labours of a Christian church, are frequently resigned as impossibilities.

But this is cowardice, not prudence ; it also implies a fearful deficiency of faith in God. For he intends that his servants shall feel their own insufficiency, and continue their labour in that very work in which their strength seems perfect weakness. He hath put this treasure into earthen vessels, which may be broken by their own contents, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of man. Placed in the phalanx of his armies, his servants must fight, but not in their own strength ; God will sustain the expenses of their warfare ; and hence, the riches of his grace, destroys the ex-

cuse so often founded on the difficulty of our undertaking.

Our text relates to temporal things ; but the principle, that he who originates a war must sustain its charges, applies to the whole conflict of mercy. This then originates in God ; by him the whole plan of operation is devised ; he has ordained the result ; he issues every commission, appoints the station of every soldier, assigns him his task, and the rich provisions of Divine grace made for his assistance, will annihilate all excuses which weakness can supply, for indifference and infidelity towards the souls of men.

You will now be directed to a proof of this statement.

I. From the riches of Divine grace.

II. From its constant accessibility.

I. The riches of grace destroy our excuses, *by presenting a perfect reconciliation with the Father.*

When Esther the queen, knew that her peo-

ple were in danger, without any provision for appeasing the king, she ventured on an act which hazarded her life for their deliverance; and Moses, when Horeb itself melted and shook beneath the burning of deserved vengeance, casts himself before his frowning God, crying, Spare this people, I beseech thee, or else blot out my name from thy book. He bore in his hand no sacrifice with which to atone for Israel's gross idolatry. His decision in the camp, and his supplication on the mountain, were both induced by the bare possibility of awakening Divine compassion. Thus God has taught us that no discouragement can remove the obligation of his law. But this is not the condition in which we are called to labour. Grace has rent the vail of heaven's most holy place, and there we see the perfect propitiation, placed by God's own hand, the Intercessor who can never die, pleading for the objects of our compassion with a reconciled God and Father. There the Infinite Eternal is seen divested of all his terror, and waiting to be gracious. When these facts were first declared on earth, they awakened a glow of feeling, of

which the most simple record stands out on the page of history, bidding defiance to all imitation by the most exalted poetic energy. When it was declared that the Messiah was come, good men and angels were alike influenced with an holy extacy. What then shall cover our inconsistency and guilt, if we, with these same facts before us, proved by the experience of so many ages, grow indifferent to the state of sinners, to whom they are of such immense importance? Oh, let us consider, and rather seek for apostolical devotedness. Knowing the terrors of the Lord, we should persuade men, "For we also are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech them by us, let us pray them in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God; for he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin. that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

2. Divine grace has provided *the most ample means for approaching the sinner's heart; and, therefore, neglect is inexcusable.*

If nothing could be educed here but the promise of mercy, which is sealed by the Saviour's atonement, this position would be in-

vulnerable ; for that unspeakable gift speaks to the heart with a most subduing energy. But this provision is not alone : men may suppose that the contact between a convert and a wicked man, is quite an accident ; but it forms an integral part of universal providence, which guides the whole machinery of grace. He who brings the Christian in contact with the sinner, gave to one the warning of mercy, and placed in the other's breast a conscience that responds to his admonition. While he speaks in love, all things around lend their subordinate assistance. Afflictions awaken, dangers alarm, mercies soothe the mind, sin convicts it of necessity and guilt ; time, as he flies past the sinner, whispers to him, *hear !* and eternity, leaning forward with his awful form, seconds the gracious admonition, *hear !* while you warn the sinner to repent, all creation, as far as it can reach him, presses its multifarious influence on his heart, persuading him to *hear*. Yes, my brethren, angels minister to your effort, and the Holy Spirit waits to work by you. How awful, then, the negligence that intercepts

this mighty operation ; all the infidelity that ever has existed could not so impede the work of God. On that neglected sinner rests the united attention of heaven, and earth, and hell : and all are waiting with extreme anxiety for the dreadful crisis. But when his sin has ripened unto death, how will the guilty Christian that neglected him, lift up his eyes before his Saviour's face ? will he be free from the dreadful requisition—blood for blood ?

Lastly, the riches of grace have *provided for our support and consolation in the work, and therefore negligence is inexcusable.*

Few persons ever consider as they should, the treasure contained in the sacred Scriptures. We think of it as a book of histories, poetry, and promises. This is true, but not all the truth. The Bible contains the application of infinite wisdom and love to the conduct of human affairs ; nations and men change before its mighty influence. But since the primary object of the whole is to disseminate the riches of mercy, God has given a greater display of wisdom and power in this department than

in any other. Hence, the book enriches beyond conception those who study it with diligence to guide them in the work of God.

But mercy smiles with peculiar delight on the path of a devoted man. He may cast in his seed with sorrow, but he gathers his sheaves with joy. Supposing the very worst result, which is a perfect failure, he cannot lose his reward : God is obeyed and honoured, and he will bless. Despised admonitions exalt the work of vengeance, and shall soften, to the saints, the terrors of the last day. When he has declared the truth, warned the sinner, and done what he could, his very silence, and the tear of his sympathy, have a most impassioned eloquence ; and such tears as are then shed, are not found to be corrosive ; they will not devour our flesh. But God will never let his servants spend their strength for nought ; often, when they least expect it, sovereign love, descending from its bright abode, levels at their feet the hardened impenitent, and bathes him in his tears. Then there is joy on earth as well as joy in heaven, because the sinner has repented ; a soul is saved from death. Oh, what bonds of

friendship, what fountains of delight originate in that event ! Earth has no language fitted to describe the joy ; God has reserved the knowledge of that bliss for those who labour with compassion and fidelity to save the souls of men.

With such truths before our eyes, it is hard to determine whether the negligent have more of guilt or folly ; for in neglecting other souls, Christians despise their own mercies. But I pass on to consider,

II. The constant accessibility of this grace.

It comes to every labourer by three things which are always present ; the Word, the Providence, and the Spirit of God. Such is the 'vantage-ground on which we stand, that no earthly power is able to close against us the book of God. That blessed gift is now unbound, pouring its light on all the churches. Again, such is our daily dependence, that we must actually cease to exist before our connexion with Providence can cease : if we ascend the heavens it is there ; if we spread out our bed in hell it is there ; could we lift the gentle wing of morning, we might dwell in lands be-

hind the sea ; but there his hand would lead us, and his right hand hold us. And, finally, the Holy Spirit descends to our habitations, our closets, and our hearts, and it attends the labourer in all his toil ; no state of affairs can separate a Christian from this heavenly Comforter, but one that is stained with guilt. And, as if all this were not sufficient to show the tenderness of Christ, he bears our nature in his own person into heaven ; with it he retains a sympathizing sense of our infirmities, and fixing his attention on our worst extremities, he not only promises grace sufficient for our day, but assures his faithful followers that this grace shall be most available in their worst emergency ; for his strength is made perfect in weakness. What gentleness is here revealed ! How like himself does the Redeemer shine ! But what excuse shall the unfaithful offer in *his judgment*, who adds to all his other mercies, the encouragement of his presence with such fountains of delight.

On this view of the subject, there are three general remarks which deserve particular notice.

First. *Consider carefully a twofold aspect in which this neglect of souls may be viewed.* First, as it operates in diminishing the advantage given to the sinner ; and, secondly, as it resists the purposes of Divine grace. To destroy the sources of happiness which God has given to his creatures, in any way, is sin ; but to close the fountain of life against those who are ready to perish, is an act at which nature itself might tremble. Our Lord reprehends the Jews for this with more severity than for any other sin. It violates the Saviour's rule of doing to others as we would have others to do to us, in the most serious of all solitudes. And with respect to himself, obedience is required to every command ; but none are so dear to him as those which relate to the work of mercy. Its passage to our earth is effected through the wounds of his own body ; it was procured by his sorrows and death : he is jealous over this great design ; the enemies who resist it, are visited with his fiercest indignation ; nations, when set against it, have been given as chaff to the flame. How then shall we expect that those whom he has here entrusted with the

special care of its operation, shall escape his frown when *they* are found unfaithful in *their great and merciful commission* ?

Secondly. *Observe the disproportion that exists between our utmost zeal and his work of grace.* Whether we reflect on the love of God in sending his Son into the world, or the love of our Lord in laying down his life for our sins ; or whether our thoughts are fixed on the kind compassion of the Holy Spirit in graciously preserving a holy intercourse with creatures so depraved, for their good ; in either instance, the act of grace is full of Divine majesty, and from the nature of the case itself, admits of no imitation in our conduct. But in the life of our Lord, he exhibits an example of kind and faithful diligence, which we are bound to copy ; yet who can read His history without feeling himself humbled to the dust under a sense of his own imperfection ? Aggressive labour for the good of souls and the conversion of sinners, was his meat and his drink. This fallen world presented to his gracious Spirit no other source of joy ; he saw from afar the night of death, and filled the day with toil. The sick, the de-

monized, the poor, the ignorant, the guilty outcasts of society were his constant care. He pitied them as sheep that had no shepherd; his nights were spent in prayer; by day he passed from city to city, and from village to village, continually doing good. Compared with his, our utmost zeal appears like cold indifference. With what jealousy, therefore, should we search our hearts when tempted to supineness! When this prevails there must be some vital error that demands repentance. How can Christians rest here when they are predestinated to conformity with his likeness? And who would approach his judgment with indifference for sinners, when the very letter of his word is, "If he laid down his life for us, we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren."

Thirdly. *Consider the admonitory aspect of saving grace.*

I refer now to those acts of love in which God exceeds the utmost limit of his promises. Such a case is seen in the Apostle Paul. We are led by God's own word to expect that praying sinners shall be blessed—but here, a

persecuting blasphemer is converted. The expectation of such grace would, without this example, have been presumptuous. Another is given in the thief. His life was filled with atrocious public crimes; and when suspended on his cross he reviled our Lord. His voice could have been heard but by few. And which of all the spectators of that awful scene who did not hear his prayer, would ever hope to meet that man in heaven? His case appeared quite hopeless. No one seemed to think of warning him again. The affection of John, the courage of Peter, and the zeal of all the disciples, were silent. But sovereign grace subdued his heart. He prayed, and his prayer was graciously heard. Here the hand of God is seen in glorious activity. Nor is this instance solitary. Amongst the abandoned, many have been blessed, and snatched as brands from the burning. The prison-house, the hospital, and the haunts of vice, have been often thus made the scenes of unexpected mercy. Jehovah loves to arrest our attention with such displays of sovereign goodness. By these, he confirms his promises, by proving his delight in mercy. "Seeing, therefore, that we are sur-

rounded with such a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us ; and let us run with patience the race set before us ; looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith : who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despised the shame, and is set down for ever at the right hand of God.”

I have conducted this inquiry, as well as I could, without referring to any controverted points. Duty requires now, that we should not pass over an objection to aggressive Christian labours founded on the Saviour's presence in his church, and the work of his Holy Spirit. It is said, “ *the Lord himself is here, let him work.*” I reply, *he is* ; and he commands you to work, and affirms that if you do not, the blood of those who perish shall be required at your hands. Which imperative will stand, think you ; that of our Divine Lord, who shall judge both quick and dead, or that of his neglecting servant, who, having refused to obey a positive command, adds to the guilt of his rebellion, by impudently telling the Creator of all things, “ to do his work of love himself ?”

Besides, causation is every where sustained

by God himself: through observing, and obeying, the rules by which the Divine Being acts, every part and process of nature is rendered useful to man. If a besieged town, famishing for bread, should command a chemist to change a large heap of dung, earth, and water, into corn, he would cry out against the cruel absurdity of the demand; and yet, by observing the laws of nature, every country farmer gets his livelihood, and feeds the empire, by doing this very thing every year. Without the Divine power, and obedience to the laws of nature, he could not change earth into corn; but, observing the laws of nature, the power of God will seldom or never let him fail. So in the work of grace; the wisest man could never change an earthly, sensual, and devilish creature into the image of Christ, without Divine assistance. The word is given to teach us where and when that assistance may be expected. This forms the law of grace; and where it is observed, the uniformity of nature is not more remarkable than the triumphs of mercy. But shall the promise of this power prevent our exertion and obedience? If so,

why does not every farmer cease to plough and sow, because he is unable to change dung into wheat? Why are not all duties despised, and all hopes resigned, since *God is the cause of all causation*?

Moreover ; a captain leads his troop into the field, commanding each soldier to maintain his position against a most desperate foe. When the conflict has grown quite hot and dreadful, measuring the strength of every man, he, seeing them about to be overpowered, draws his sword, plunges himself into the conflict, and stands before his men, covered with wounds and smeared with blood. And while he is seen thus bearing down upon the enemy, shall his personal engagement and danger be regarded as a reason for the flight of his own followers, whom he came to assist? Would not the wretch who turned at such a time be punished as a traitor of the worst kind? Such then is the case of our Lord : he stands before us in his wounds, to make us heroes in his cause—not cowards and traitors.

DISTINGUISHING GRACE.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN MAKING
REQUISITION FOR NEGLECTED SOULS, AS IT
IS SEEN IN THE RICHES OF DISTINGUISHING
GRACE.

“For who hath made thee to differ?” 1 Cor. iv. 7.

ONE characteristical feature of the Divine oracles, which proves their inspiration, is, that fidelity through which they demand at once our most entire confidence. By this we are made acquainted with many facts relating to the ancient churches, which are much to their discredit; and the study of which is often exceedingly painful to us. From hence, however,

we derive great and valuable instruction. We see the character of those men, on whom the riches of grace were first poured forth with such munificence. They appear before us with many degrading features of heathen nations. By this we are taught that mercy, from the beginning, was extended to sinners as they existed in the world; and hence we derive a full encouragement to seek that mercy in our deepest necessities, and to proclaim it with freedom and zeal, to the most degraded of our species.

Perhaps it will be found that the Corinthian church had more deplorable defects than any other. Crimes are reprehended amongst its members, at the name of which we tremble. One reason for this will be found in the extreme corruption of their city. It was as eminent for its debaucheries as Athens was for its politeness. The converts, who were rescued from this degradation, brought with them into the church remains of former habits; amongst them was a love of parties, and an undue estimation of themselves. Our text contains a severe rebuke for this folly; all the ground of

their boasting is taken away by the fact, that if they differed, it was because they had been distinguished by sovereign grace. To the riches of this grace the attention is now solicited, as affording a further justification of the law, by which the neglect of souls is vindicated.

By *sovereign grace*, I understand, such displays of mercy, as are either greater in degree than any promise would justly lead us to expect, or, such as are given under circumstances to which no promise will properly apply. And these bestowments of mercy are *distinguishing*, when the blessings received by one man are greater than those which are bestowed on a similar character in the same condition as that in which he received them. An instance of both these kinds of Divine bounty is given us in the apostle Paul. The promise of grace pledges a complete pardon to all who repent and believe ; but Paul was visited in mercy on the road to Damascus—in the very act of persecution—when blaspheming the name of Jesus, and when seeking the destruction of his saints. To such a character no promise will apply. While his pernicious rebellion is continued, he has

nothing but a fearful looking-for of judgment; and therefore, the grace which brought Paul to repentance, and made him pray for mercy, was sovereign. But there were many persecutors on whom the blessings of mercy did not so descend; and therefore, he was made a recipient of distinguishing grace.

Most believers, in reviewing their experience, will find something of the same kind; one in one way, and another in another way, will see the love of God displayed to him, in a degree, and at a time, which exceed the highest expectations that the promise has ever awakened in his heart. Christians are thus led to adore the riches of sovereign grace. Day after day, its wonderful magnificence unfolds with increasing majesty, and they seem a mystery to themselves. While God is taking one of a family, and two of a city, and bringing them to Zion, each redeemed soul exclaims,

“ Why was I made to hear his voice,
And enter while there's room,
While others make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come ?”

The answer to this question, will constitute the basis of our present argument ; for,

1. The riches of sovereign and distinguishing grace *afford the strongest confirmation of its general promises ; and, therefore the neglect of souls is inexcusable.*

God appeals to a sinner's heart principally by three things : first, the kindness of his forbearance ; secondly, the fulness of his promise ; and, thirdly, the munificence of his actions. Every hour through which the life of a sinner is protracted, involves an appeal to his heart ; and, if he had no other ground of hope, he might, at least, be led to make the best of this. God explains the mystery which its continuance often seems to involve, by assuring us that his long-suffering was constantly leading men to repentance. To encourage this, his promise of pardon and favour to the penitent is exhibited in every variety of form, and pressed by every kind of argument ; but, in receiving a promise, we lie under a painful difficulty. Words will not suggest to our minds ideas which have never been entertained there. We, who show so little mercy, can never understand, therefore,

the richness of that grace which God proclaims. If it arrest the attention, an awakened sinner will often wonder what the promise means. Its words are plain enough, but its bounty is inconceivable. Faith itself is crushed by the very weight of goodness it is called to embrace. While sinners are thus standing round, and staggering at the promises, separated by their concern from the world, and withheld from the church by unbelief; God, in his infinite mercy, seizes some hardened sinner before their eyes, deals with him graciously, but with great power, subdues his spirit, pours out his tears of repentance on the earth, and then heals his broken heart, and removes the pollution of his former habits. The Holy Spirit creates this rescued sinner entirely anew: and, placing him in the midst of his wavering creatures, God expounds his promise by his actions: for his language, in every such case of distinguishing mercy, is, "See, in this subdued, and renovated rebel, an instance of my mercy:—this is what I mean by forgiveness, by justification, by sanctification, and the purifying influence of the blood of Christ.

As we use an experiment to prove a principle, and exercise a principle in nature to invite an experiment which shall diffuse its influence and benefit, so God is pleased to use the magnificent instances of distinguishing grace which stand before our eyes. They prove the efficacy of prayer, often in the most hopeless cases. Through them, the delight which God has in showing mercy, is submitted to fresh proof by actual experience. The world, and the church, are thus encouraged to trust in him; men are made to trace these mercies in themselves; and sovereign grace rescuing and keeping them, when no promise would apply to their case, makes them more bold in pleading the promise under subsequent emergencies. Thus the apostle stood before mankind, *an instance of all long-suffering*. As he had received mercy, he did not faint when sorrow came, but expected and found a further development of love. The grace of God was exceedingly abundant in him, and his very existence was a confirmation, and a seal, set on the promise of Divine mercy: but did this make him indifferent to others? No—it made him tremble at

the thought of their neglect. Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel; for how shall he escape the dreadful requisition, who not only receives the warning of mercy, which he hides, but who stands and lives a new-born instance of sovereign compassion, whose very being upon earth is a standing proof that life is accessible to the chief of sinners?

2. Sovereign and distinguishing grace raises a sinner to the highest elevation, and therefore his neglect of souls is inexcusable.

Our argument here is based on the obligation of gratitude. By this, we are bound to return the goodness we receive with love and service. In no relationship that exists in society is a violation of this law considered excusable. An ungrateful man is, therefore, marked for reprehension without pity, and forsaken, even in his sorrow, without remorse: but every favour we receive from God appeals to our gratitude; first, on the ground of its value; and, secondly, because of the condescending love in which it originated. Gratitude to God, therefore, is demanded, at every moment, for all we have to enjoy; and he who

refuses praise is condemned for a crime which dishonours the Father of angels and men. When the claim which rests on the general work of Redemption is considered, we are brought into the midst of mercies which destroy all idea of individual property, even in our own persons. We are not our own, being bought with a price. Our bodies and spirits, when fully consecrated, form but a poor return for the precious blood of Christ ; but sovereign and distinguishing grace advances beyond this munificence. It sends down the Spirit of grace to change our stony and polluted hearts, and to open a way for the entrance of our Lord. Had we been left to devise a method by which this favour might be returned, reason would have exhausted all its powers without discovering an opportunity for its exercise ; but Infinite wisdom found a sphere suited to our nature, capabilities, and obligations. We had been sinners, and he sends us to sinners ;—we had found mercy, and he sends us to show mercy ;—we had been quickened, and he sends us to use the life thus given in conveying the word of life to others. Thus he extends his munifi-

cence from man to man ; and, identifying himself with the worst, and most destitute, he exclaims, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of these, ye did it also unto me."

There is an elegance in this arrangement which magnifies eternal wisdom ; for not only is this the only sphere in which the munificence of distinguishing grace can be returned by our grateful service, but the gift that binds the servant to devotedness gives him a greater facility in his work ; while the work itself, by making the fallen man a fellow-worker with God, constantly elevates his mind, and promotes his sanctification. No man is so competent to speak of mercy as he who has been blessed by receiving distinguishing grace. This thought filled the apostle's heart. Explaining the nature of his own guilt, he felt that the freedom of grace required no further proof, when he added, "*and I have received mercy.*" Such distinguished men are a living proof how God delights to bless the guilty. To them can be given no favour so great, no exaltation so high, as that which employs them in the work of God. Hence the awful feeling of

responsibility which always pervaded the apostle's soul. He laboured as one that must give an account; and, hence, the inexcusable sin of those who, recognising such mercy in their own experience, neglect the admonition of their fellow-sinners.

Thirdly. *Distinguishing grace renders the neglect of souls still more inexcusable, by the sacred trust it commits to the care of its recipients.*

“ Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” Such is the originality of Gospel mercy, it had never entered the heart of man to become an object of his desire. It was hid in God from before the foundation of the world. Angels did not know it, until God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shined in the hearts of his servants; to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ. When this mighty treasure was to be deposited for the use of sinners; to awaken their desire, and secure their faith: a single glance at its dreadful

purchase might lead us to expect that God would exercise the most jealous care in electing the agents in his work of mercy. For, though *we* may be *cold* in *our* sympathies, nothing can be further from the heart of Him who withheld not his only Son, but freely gave him up for us all. That blood-bought blessing would never be deposited with indifference : but every principle of reason would lead us to conclude, that such guardians should be chosen, as from the principles of their nature, would be constantly induced to preserve it with care, and to labour diligently in accomplishing its design. Hence, God did not employ the holy angels, because their sympathy with our nature is far less than the case requires. Bad men and fallen angels would feel an interest in obstructing its design ; and therefore they could not be entrusted with the treasure. Who, then, could become the messengers of mercy ? Why, sovereign grace prepares the instruments and agents for his own work. From the general and polluted mass of society it selects individuals ; distinguishes them by renewing grace, and makes them vessels unto honour. Filled with this heavenly

treasure, they stand in the sanctuary of their Lord, that every sinner might receive from them the living waters of grace. To their faithful protection is committed a treasure on which sinners must live, and which the angels desire to look into. If faithful, the manifold wisdom of God is daily unfolded through their instrumentality; if they be unfaithful, God is dishonoured in the object of his tenderest regard. The Lord, the righteous Judge, will look on no unfaithfulness with pleasure; but infidelity to this, involves a complication of sins, for which the frown of Jehovah itself would seem too mild a punishment.

“*His blood will I require at thy hands,*” will sound on the ear of a negligent Christian more awfully than the thunder of an approaching tempest, when he looks on sinners perishing through his neglect, amidst such endearing responsibilities.

Fourthly. *The rewards which are bestowed on the faithful improvement of sovereign grace render the neglect of sinners inexcusable.*

The vessels of honour which hold the treasure of grace are made from the same mass of

sinful clay as the vessels of dishonour ; and therefore they can have no other *claim* than such as are, by nature, fitted for destruction. Whatever a Christian enjoys beyond what his fellow-sinners are seen to possess, may awaken his gladness, but can never result from his merit. Our blessings are all of grace, and the same principle will prevail through all the course of our discipline ; but God gives grace upon grace, and causes favour to follow favour. Hence, he who improved ten talents is made the recipient of other talents ; and grace improved, constantly leads to an augmentation of its munificence.

But it is not merely in the increase of grace that diligence will find its reward : the very end of all operations shall be by them enjoyed ; for, in a certain sense, earth may be said to exist for no other end than to obtain from it the glory and delight which Christ shall gain in the result of his Redemption. Of their majesty and blessedness, the strongest conception we can form is suggested by the apostle, when he states that for these our Lord himself endured the cross, and despised the shame.

This is the joy of our Lord :—a Divine inheritance gathered from this ruined earth by Infinite compassion, wisdom, and power. For this joy the Redeemer waits, employing his distinguished servants in the prosecution of his gracious design ;—they labouring on earth while he intercedes in heaven. Every dispensation of Providence advances the end ; and the time shall soon come when all things on earth, and all in heaven, shall own the dominion of Jesus ; while hell, to the deepest recesses of its ruin, shall tremble through the terror of his frown. What the blessedness of that celestial triumph must be our earthly minds are unable to conceive : but this we know,—the saints shall share this victory with their Lord ;—*they shall enter into his joy*,—have similar emotions of delight,—similar recollections of trial,—and they shall realize a similar satisfaction. Hence we see the kindness of our Lord. He went before us, through the scenes of his sorrow, to teach us, by example, how to suffer ; he leaves us for a little while, that his presence with the Father may gain for his people consolation and support ; but when he enters into

his joy, his suffering and waiting people shall enter with him. He will not possess his joy alone. The faithful follower of Christ shall be with him, where he is, and behold his glory. As on earth their interests have been the same, so, in heaven, those who have suffered with him shall also reign with him. The Lord and his people shall rejoice together. That peculiar inheritance, therefore, for which our Lord himself endured the Cross, and on which his heart shall rest with holy satisfaction through all eternity, is thus presented as an inducement to devotedness in the work of God. As Christ endured the Cross for this, each saint is thus placed in immediate comparison with the Saviour, and in reference to the same object. If when a sinner should be warned, the neglectful Christian refuses the Cross, and shudders at the shame, he exhibits an entire contrast with his Saviour. The contrast too is one in which all the interests which are most endeared to his glorified Lord are sacrificed at once. It presents a peculiarity in the phenomenon of crime, and hazards the interests of eternity where their security should be most fully en-

joyed; for who will dare to ask for mercy, in such a case, when mercy has closed her door of hope, and finished her work below? She would feel herself injured in the passing over of that offence, and meet the unfaithful Christian when forcing his way into the joy of his Lord; and, mildly crossing his path, command him to stand, and first restore those objects of her dear compassion which were lost for ever through his guilty neglect.

Illustrations of this argument may be found through the writings of Paul, in great abundance. He regarded himself as a living testimony of God's free grace to the very chief of sinners. Such he regarded his brethren. *The whole elect bear the same character.* Wherever God had bestowed distinguishing mercies, there the apostle recognised a confirmation of Jehovah's delight in mercy, and a peculiar obligation which bound the recipient to be faithful in its work.

Hence, the riches of distinguishing grace apply to different characters, in the same way as the principle and precept of Divine law. In the lowest and least degree, the grace which renders a guilty man sensible of his danger,

binds him to run all hazards in making that danger known to others, his companions in sin, who are exposed to the same ruin. When distinguishing grace has given that sinner peace, it binds him to display the reality and grounds of that peace to others. When it has advanced his purity, and made him happy in the fellowship of a Christian church, he is bound to point out the open door to other wanderers in this exposed and howling wilderness. If distinguishing grace has given him a good degree, and great boldness in the house of God, by making him bear the office of a deacon, that additional mercy binds him with greater power to his work of love; and when the highest honour held by man on earth is granted, by putting a once-ruined rebel into the ministry, this abounding of grace is combined with an abounding obligation. Wherever an opportunity for serving God, in the warning of sinners, is given, law, justice, and humanity require that it should be improved; but when the opportunity for benefiting others is blended with peculiar mercy to himself, gratitude to the God of all compassion gives

force to every other bond in binding the Christian to obedience, and adds fire to every other motive which can kindle his zeal, and sustain his activity.

To every individual in the church, therefore, it is of the last importance *that he be found faithful*. He should press the inquiry with his utmost vigour, for the object is of no trivial import. No position will be found, on which to rest with perfect satisfaction, but that which gives the most perfect assurance that *all he could do for souls has been done*. Sooner or later, deficiencies must be felt here, and felt bitterly. They should, therefore, be avoided from the beginning of our Christian life. What our Lord said in his last prayer should be the aim of every mind: “The work which thou hast *given me to do* I have *completed*.” When grace can be magnified in this result, a Christian may lie down in peace; but the slumber of death will be dreadful to that spirit who bears on its skirts, in the unseen world, the blood of neglected souls.

Every view that we can take of this solemn subject, therefore, should lead us to direct our

whole energies to the admonition of rebellious sinners, and to the attainment of their conversion ; for if we trifle with this point, and suffer it to be superseded by others, however important in other respects, we shall be in danger of the dreadful requisition. This should be the first and principal care of parents, and the instructors of children ;—it should distinguish the labour and solicitude of Christians in every department :—in the Sabbath school, — the Bible class, — Christian correspondence, — intercourse with the world, — visitation of the sick, — advice given to the poor, — and all discourses delivered in the house of God ;—whatever is studied should be studied for that end, and whatever is taught should be so taught as to promote this design ;—our hearts should be ever set upon this work of love—the rescue of men that are ready to perish ;—and prayer should rise up to God perpetually on their behalf, —in the closet, —in the family, —in social meetings, —in the church, —and in public worship ;—every where, and at all times, saints should be found travailing in birth for souls, as men that must give an account.

And further : Christians are bound to use, in advancing the conversion of men, the peculiar riches of Christ. The law is good if a man use it lawfully, but God has given the Gospel because the law was weak through the flesh. Before our Lord came into the world, heathen teachers learned and digested the great principles of moral truth with a completeness and accuracy which still command our admiration. God knew that these, at the best, were ineffectual. He therefore unfolded the unsearchable riches of Christ,—he explained the doctrine of mercy,—he beautified the theory of religion by the lessons and example of our Lord,—revealed the glorious hereafter which creates our hope,—and strengthened every motive to repentance by his own presence and blessing;—he taught men how to glory in tribulation, and to triumph in death ;—he set forth before us a perfect propitiation, and promised the outpouring of his Holy Spirit. Amongst these mysteries of grace, Christians find a treasure which had been hid in God, and of which no knowledge could have been obtained by man without his special aid. Whatever good might have been

derived from other sources, none could have been possessed that equalled these. We are bound to use these mercies, therefore, with our utmost vigour and vigilance ; for, when they are resigned, we return to the gloomy disadvantage of heathens, and become responsible for all the ruin which such an error entails on the children of men.

To guide the labourer in this merciful design, it will be very important for him to keep constantly before his mind the instructive and admonitory conception of some superior example. Perhaps, amongst mere men, a greater will not be found than Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles. His works contain the most full and magnificent descriptions of sovereign grace. A sentence never escapes him which does not show a heart in love with this exalted theme. But his labours were peculiarly aggressive ; it was his delight to preach the Gospel where its truths were unknown ; and cases occur in his life by which almost every duty is defined by his inspired example. With the whole working of his mind, every Christian should have a full and intimate acquaintance ; but one or two

instances may be noted here to guide the student in seeking others.

First. In Acts xvii. 15 to 34, an incident is recorded which shows the moral courage with which he encountered a case of great spiritual difficulty. At Athens, human folly was deified in almost every form of its operation. The city was given to idolatry. Its population was grossly corrupt, especially with intellectual vices. It was probably on the very spot where Paul stood on Mars' Hill, that Socrates was condemned to death for reproving his countrymen; but no danger could intimidate the apostle,—no difficulty could subdue his resolution: his spirit was stirred within him. Not satisfied with disputing in the synagogue, he entered the high senatorial assembly, admonishing the judges to repent; and seemed resolved to neglect nothing that was needful to prepare his mind for looking down on their future ruin with all the satisfaction of one who had done what he could for their rescue.

Secondly. The very next chapter (Acts xviii. 1 to 19) presents an instance of his conduct in a case of extensive and general

debauchery. He was here “pressed in spirit,” and taught the Jews until, by their rejection, he could shake his raiment, and say, “*Your blood be upon your own heads,—I am clean.*” He then turned to the Gentiles: but since their mercenary spirit was dreadful, and their uncleanness such as to render it a disgrace to be called a Corinthian, he wrought with his own hands, and lived on the fruit of his own labour, that the ordinary support of a Gospel minister might not mislead them as to his motive. For two whole years, in great trial, he sustained this toil, “continually bearing about in his own body the dying of the Lord Jesus.” His two epistles to the Corinthian church form a most affecting comment on this part of his history. His Christian compassion for the souls in that city was majestic; and the church to which his epistles were addressed, with all its faults, was a great reward for his devoted exertions.

Thirdly. When exposed to extreme personal danger his conduct may be explained by Acts xix. 1—41, and Acts xxi. to the end of the book. In Ephesus, Jerusalem, and Rome,

his life was in constant danger ; he stood as one delivered unto death for Jesus' sake ; every kind of instrument was used to subdue his courage and constancy—the mob of Ephesus, the Jewish priesthood, the provincial authorities, and the court of Cæsar. He was moved by none ; he never lost the compassion of his heart, even when standing at the judgment-seat of princes. Every thing he wrote during this period, was full of sympathy for souls, and expressed the most profound sense of his responsibility. His epistles to Timothy breathe an inextinguishable ardour, and every feeling grows more perfect as his death becomes more certain ; while nothing in the history of man can be more magnificent than the joy with which he referred to his approaching martyrdom.

Fourthly. We hear little of his relations ; perhaps there were few of them associated with him in the church. His feeling for them was intense and generous, so much so, that some have contended that his words could not be literally understood. But the difficulty we feel in realizing his emotions is occasioned by

our deficiency in feeling, not by his excess. It is much more reasonable for compassion to drown the whole capabilities of selfish calculation, and make us wish ourselves accursed from Christ for our kindred, than it is to pass them by with indifference; and therefore the apostle felt that all he could do was too little in such an emergency.

Besides the uniformity and practical nature of his compassion, it is also well to observe the serenity and vigour with which he used his ripest energies in the work. The keenness of his perception, his most accurate judgment, his conclusive reasoning, and his powerful oratory; whatever he possessed, either by nature or by grace, was consecrated here; and while he longed to be with Jesus, which is far better, he did still desire to prolong his earthly, laborious, and sorrowful existence, for the furtherance of faith in his fellow-men.

The example of our Lord is as much superior to that of the apostle, as the apostle is superior to other men. For, passing over those features which distinguish his Divine majesty, all the firmer and more vigorous virtues needful to

sustain the aggressive labours of Christians are combined in him with the most heavenly tenderness. When our thoughts are fixed on any one excellency in his character, its perfection seems to indicate that all his attention had been directed to its culture; and yet, when we pass over the whole, a similar perfection is found in each, and all are ready at every moment of action. He is never surprised by any accident in the midst of affliction for which he feels no sympathizing pity. Prudence and zeal are never wanting. An instance does not occur in his whole life, wherein it might be said that an opportunity for doing good was lost. His various perfections are mingled in his character, with a delicacy which exceeds the composition of prismatic colours in the light of heaven. He is the light of the world, and the riches of his goodness fall on the objects of his compassion, with a munificence that exceeds the full day-beam; he every where appears as a sun in whom there is no darkness at all. His discourses and his acts of mercy, are the best models for useful labour. His life is the richest source of in-

struction; all precepts are comprised in that one expression, "*follow me;*" and every objection to devoted labour ought to be annihilated for ever, by the promise "*Where I am, there shall my servant be also.*"

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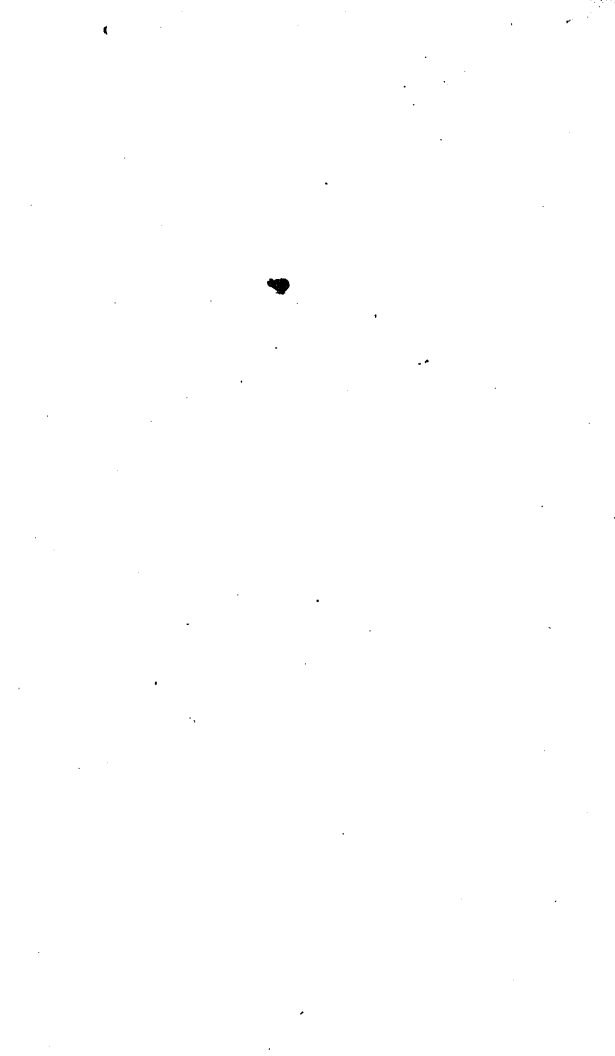
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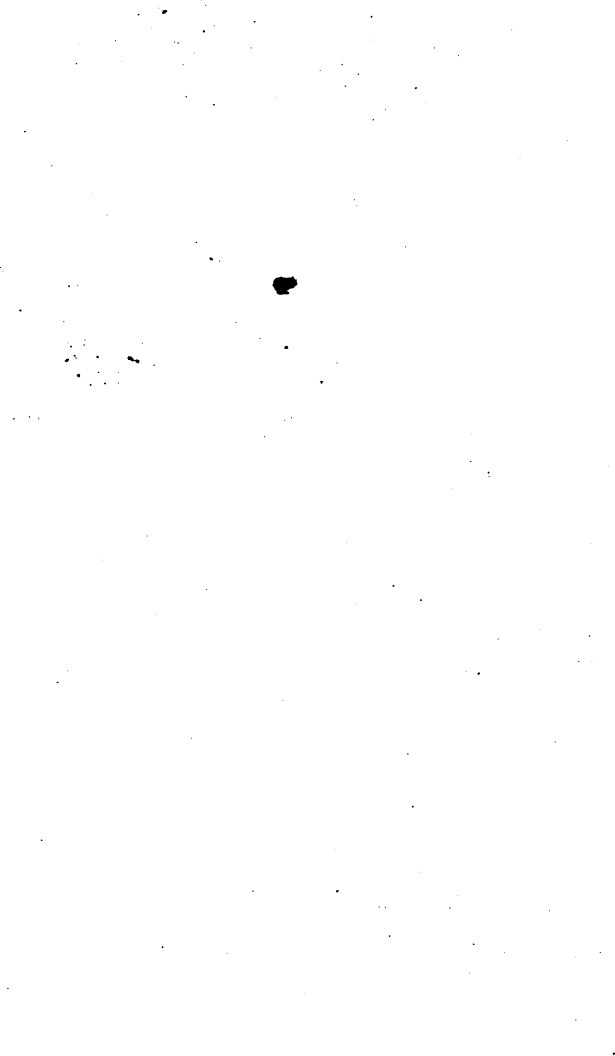
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